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**Telling the story of agriculture: An analysis of agriculture literacy themes in children's books selected for Pennsylvania Ag Literacy Week from 2021 to 2025**

**Need for research**

Agriculture (Ag) Literacy Week is an initiative of the National Agriculture in the Classroom. Annually, this initiative devotes a week to connecting agriculture community volunteers to K-2 classrooms to tell the “story of agriculture” (PA Friends of Ag, 2026). The volunteers visit classrooms and read the selected children’s books and facilitate related learning activities designed by the PA Friends of Ag. Additionally, volunteers may share their personal connections with agriculture, ultimately being the “faces of agriculture” to the students. While the program’s digital archive shows literacy week programming dating back to 2017, no study has been conducted to ascertain what agricultural literacy themes are captured in selected children’s books. This poster analyzes the selected books for PA Ag Literacy Week from the last five years (2021 – 2025) to uncover those themes.

**Conceptual framework**

This study was guided by the foundational framework for agricultural literacy (Frick et al., 1991). To achieve agricultural literacy, the framework proposes proficiency in the following agricultural literacy theme areas: (1) the relationship with the environment, (2) agricultural processing, (3) public policies, (4) relationship with natural resources, (5) animal products, (6) societal significance, (7) plant products, (8) economic impact, (9) agricultural marketing, (10) distribution, and (11) global significance. This framework compared with the aggregated five-component Food and Fiber Systems Literacy (FFSL) framework (Leising & Zilbert, 1994) is more suitable for the analysis of children’s books.

**Methodology**

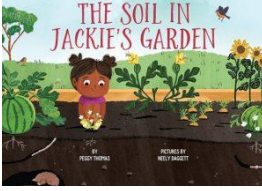
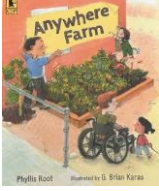
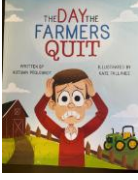

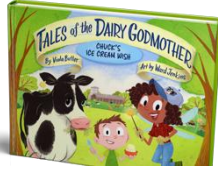
A directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) was used to identify the major agricultural literacy themes in five children’s books between 2021 and 2025. Data (selected children’s books for Ag Literacy Week and accompanying lesson plans) were collected from the PA Friends of Ag website. I read each book, noting the duration it took to complete, the characters, illustrations, and agricultural literacy themes Frick et al. (1991) represented in them .

**Findings**

The five books were published between 2017 and 2024. Reading duration for all books ranged between five to seven minutes. They all contain pictures and use rhyming mono/bi-syllabic words as well as other literary devices (pun and onomatopoeia) to engage young students. The pictures reflected diversity in gender, race, rural/urban, and small/big scale agriculture holdings. Three out of the five books explored plant products theme area which corroborates Koy and Tarpley’s (2020) findings in which elementary agriculture texts inclined towards more plant product topics. Almost all the agricultural literacy theme areas except public policies and global significance were covered in the children’s books, with each book capturing multiple agricultural literacy subject matters as seen in Table 1.

**Table 1: Showing selected children’s books for Ag Literacy Week from 2021-2025 and themes**

Year	Book title and blurb	Cover	Ag literacy themes
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2025	<p><b>The Soil in Jackie’s Garden</b>  <i>Written by Peggy Thomas, Illustrated by Neely Daggett</i>            “Jackie and her garden friends embrace the joys of planting a garden, nurturing and harvesting their own food, and recycling scraps to compost... Science facts about soil, plants, pollinators, decomposers, and more are included on every spread.”</p>		<p>Relationship with the environment,            Relationship with natural resources,            Plant products,</p>
2024	<p><b>Anywhere Farm</b>  <i>Written by Phyllis Root, Illustrated by G. Brian Karas</i>            “Anywhere Farm allows children to explore the different options one can plant a farm. From a box or bucket to a pan, almost anything can be turned into a home for green, growing things. Windows, balconies, and front steps all make wonderful spots to start.”</p>		<p>Plant products,            Relationship with the environment,            Agricultural marketing</p>
2023	<p><b>The Day the Farmers Quit</b>  <i>Written by Autumn Pequignot, Illustrated by Kate Fallahee</i>            “The Day The Farmers Quit is an encouraging story of a boy that learns he can’t live without the hard work of his farmer friends. ...this young boy wakes up to ... Farmer Bob and his farmer friends decide to take a vacation.”</p>		<p>Societal significance,            Economic impact</p>
2022	<p><b>My Family’s Soybean Farm</b>  <i>Written by Katie Olthoff Illustrated by Joe Hox</i>            “My Family’s Soybean Farm details the day to day activities of a farming family through the eyes of young Alexander who lives on his family’s farm. ... readers will learn about how plants grow, ...and how they are harvested”</p>		<p>Plant products,            Agricultural processing,            Agricultural marketing,            Distribution</p>
2021	<p><b>Tales of the Dairy Godmother</b>  <i>Written by Viola Butler, Illustrated by Ward Jenkins</i>  <i>Chuck’s Ice Cream Wish</i> is an engaging book about agriculture taking its readers behind the scenes to a dairy farm to learn about how we get the milk used to make ice cream”</p>		<p>Animal products,            Agricultural processing</p>

### Conclusions and Implications/recommendations

This study revealed how age-appropriate literary arts could introduce students to multiple agricultural literacy theme areas. Contrary to extant literature, the children’s books covered contemporary agriculture depictions (Mixdorf, 2002). Considering that limited time is a major implementation constraint for elementary agricultural education in PA (Plunkert et al., 2026), weaving these five to seven-minute agriculture-themed books into Language Arts could offer elementary students sustained exposure to agriculture throughout the school year.

## References

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